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ROLL UP, ROLL UP!

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Roll up, roll up! Come and see the amazing naïve author, the swell-headed editor, and the incredible publishing shark.

Among the misdeeds and faults of science dissemination, predatory publishing is one of the worst.

Predatory publishing is an open access model charging authors for swift and easy publication, whereby the editorial process is minimised and ethical and scientific standards disparaged.

Predatory publishing is a virus that is infecting our science. Authors are easy prey in its unruly market. This is due to our own ignorance, superficiality and negligence, as well to our inflated ego, which blurs our judgement with vanity (Satan's favourite sin). For example, predatory publications cite their own fictional quality indexes, mimicking the genuine, albeit criticised (Della Sala & Cubelli, 2013), Impact Factor: Global Impact Factor; Universal Impact Factor; Journal Impact Factor....

Preposterously, authors, enticed by unsolicited email invitations, fall for these inane tricks. It is also due to the pressure for career signifiers, including, in several countries, the stress on number of publications, independent of quality.

The outcome can be paraphrased from Theodore Sturgeon's law: 90 per cent of everything (published) is crap. This point was gaudily demonstrated by Phil Davis, whose computer-generated nonsensical text was accepted for publication after the publisher said it had been peer-reviewed (Davis, 2009). John Bohannon (2013) similarly tested the integrity of the publishing world with a cunning sting. For 10 months he submitted a clearly flawed paper, always the same, at a rate of 10 submissions per week to several purportedly predatory outlets. More than six out of ten of these submissions were accepted with no questions asked (and with no evidence of peer review). Some of the journals that accepted this bogus submission were run by major publishing companies: the virus is spreading fast. Another, more goliardic illumination of this model of publication is the acceptance of Mazières and Kohler's notorious rant whereby the sentence "Get me off your fucking mailing list" was repeated for 10 pages and illustrated by figures and graphs using the same text (Zarrell, 2014).

Predatory publishing has recently been branded "an emerging threat" (Harvey & Weinstein, 2017). This threat is not only to the scientific community; journalists and the general public may have even more trouble distinguishing good peer-reviewed material from vanity press, making it almost impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff (Cubelli & Della Sala, 2015) seriously damaging the

wider dissemination of science. The well-meant criteria set by the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) are not enough to stop the tide of predatory publishing. This may also be due to the conflicts of interest which mar its membership, as testified by the recent alarming report of a hugely criticised (and later retracted) article, reiterating a thoroughly-discredited link between vaccines and autism, provisionally accepted by a company member of the OASPA. The study was apparently funded by an anti-vaccines campaigner, reviewed by a chiropractor, and handled by an editor with little publishing experience himself (see, <http://retractionwatch.com/2016/11/28/study-linking-vaccines-autism-pulled-frontiers-following-heavy-criticism/>).

Something drastic must be done or the entire scientific community may end up in ridicule. We must discourage scientists from publishing in predatory outlets, from sitting on their editorial boards, and from reviewing (mostly uselessly) for them. I propose that association with predatory outlets, whoever they belong to, should count negatively in one's career. That is, publications in such journals should count *against* the author's output. Similarly, if one sits on any of these journals' editorial board, this should count as a negative contribution to the scientific community. Funding bodies should not consider as acceptable products publications in predatory outlets, and applicants who publish in these journals should not see their funding renewed. We all could do our share also when submitting our own work, for instance ignoring papers which appeared in outlets whose editorial process is not transparent. Given that we as authors will be subject to cognitive dissonance if we published in non-respectable outlets, and knowing that authors often cite themselves (Schreiber, 2007), the editorial boards of peer-reviewed journals should take action and ban citations from predatory publications. I admit that it may be difficult to establish a reliable black list: previous attempts have ended up in reproaches and lawsuits. However, we seriously need to consider some form of disapproval of this publishing model, or vanity will take us all to hell.

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